



*Instituut voor Informatierecht
Institute for Information Law*

Call for papers, workshops, interventions for

Money talks?

The impact of corporate funding on academic research in information law and policy

*An event by the European Hub of the Global Network of Centers for Internet and Society (NoC),
organized by the Institute for Information Law, University of Amsterdam*

October 23, 2019, Amsterdam

Concerns about the corporate funding of scientific research, and about the presence of corporate sponsors in scientific events are not an exceptional issue in the academic field. For decades, scientific domains like medicine, [climate](#) research, [health](#) and [nutrition](#) science have been struggling with [controversies](#) and dilemmas around the direct and indirect impact of corporate [funding](#) on the quality of their scholarship, integrity, independence, both actual, and as perceived by others.

Research in the domain of the information society is not immune to these controversies. For example, the emerging giants of the information society are active research funders, and promote academic research as a way to influence public policy, or at least are perceived to do so. The information industry is also increasingly in exclusive control of fundamental research resources, such as data, or technology design. The 2017 [Campaign for Accountability](#) (CA) controversy perfectly captures the complexity of the situation this creates around science. CA was apparently set out to identify Google's influence on information policy research and (controversially) identified 329 research papers on public policy matters that were directly or indirectly funded by the search company. Only later it turned out that one of the funders of CA was [Oracle](#), which at the same time was fighting Google in Court, and perceived CA as part of that effort.

In September 2018 a [wide group of academics raised concerns](#) about the role of surveillance technology company Palantir as sponsor of academic events on data privacy. The subsequent debate raised important questions about the dimensions in which different corporations active in the online world should be critically assessed, and the terms on which science can engage with them.

The growing concerns about the influence of corporate funding of academic research in all disciplines can be attributed to the effects of several connected factors. For a number of financial, political and social reasons there is a significant pressure on academics to be entrepreneurial, and attract and pursue funding from [private sources](#). Large corporations have been responding to this situation with often substantial amounts of funding, and various forms of collaborations.



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On the other hand, access to private funders and corporate sponsors may carry benefits: corporate participation is a prerequisite of a substantive and inclusive dialogue on contentious issues and policy developments. It can also foster collaborations, and provide scientists access to information, data, people, which would otherwise remain beyond reach. However, the intentions of corporations to invest in academic research are not always transparent. Some consider it to be relatively harmless when corporate sponsorship is motivated by the desire to associate their brand with academia, or to contribute to society to boost the public company image. Others claim that corporations may decide to fund research with malevolent intentions in order to influence the public debate, or pursue some hidden agenda. It often remains unclear for the public what motivates a company to fund academic research. Corporate sponsorship may be seen as suspicious, and detrimental to the results of the scientific outcomes, even if it was done with the right motivation, an ultimately it may also have an impact on the public trust in science.

In order to prevent a conflict of interest and to ensure objectivity and transparency in research, [institutions](#) and governments have been [developing policies](#) and [guidelines](#) to foster integrity. The resulting codes of conducts are based on several widely supported fundamental principles which are translated into more specific standards for good research practices. The [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), for instance, is built around four principles: reliability, honesty, respect and accountability.

Yet, it remains to be seen how effectively such [international](#), European, national, and domain specific codes of conducts can be monitored, and enforced, and how effective they can be in safeguarding both the integrity of research, and its public perception.

Recent events and the call for an action-oriented discussion on corporate sponsorship therefore warrant the *impact of corporate funding on academic research* as the theme for the next meeting for the European Hub of the Global Network of Centers for Internet and Society (NoC). The conference strives to bring together scholars within the information law discipline, as well as related fields to discuss questions such as:

Understanding the problem: the scope, structure, amount, topics and beneficiaries of corporate funding in research

- How big corporate influence is in the first place? How much money are we talking about?
- What are the forms of (corporate) research funding, such as financial support, funded positions, data access, etc.?
- What drives corporate funding decisions?

Internal safeguards of research independence and integrity

- What are the best ways to safeguard research independence and integrity?
- Are the current principles and safeguards that guide engagement with corporate sponsors and funders adequate?
- What are the limitations of current integrity safeguards? Is there room for improvement?



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- Are there specific/additional principles that should to inform such engagement in the area of information law and policy?
- Does it make sense to differentiate between different forms of sponsoring (institutional/project, in-kind/access/money)?

Interfaces and firewalls between academia and industry

- What kind of integrity-infrastructure does academia need for the future where more and more essential resources are going to be in the exclusive control of corporations?
- What legal and policy innovations are needed to ensure due access to privately held or controller data sources?
- How could standards be set for the acceptance of corporate funding? What are the existing methods of standard setting?
- What is a proper way to signal the company support without creating the impression of industry research?

The impact of corporate funding

- How to manage public trust in academia which is increasingly funded by private parties?
- What are the effects of increased acceptance of private funding of academic research on government spending on science?
- Are some geographies, institutions, and initiatives more dependent on, or more exposed to corporate funding? How to address these differences?
- Are there neglected research topics because they do not attract corporate funding?
- How to deal with public funding from authoritarian regimes?

We welcome individual paper proposals and panel and workshop proposals, and other forms of interventions and actions.

Please submit paper abstracts, and panel proposals of no more than a 1000 words to the following email address: money.talks@ivir.nl by **July 1st, 2019**. Acceptance decisions will be communicated in about a month.